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ART. XVI.—*A Grammar of the English Language, containing a variety of critical remarks, the principal part of which are original. By John Barrett, of Hopkinton, state of Massachusetts; teacher of the Greek, Latin, and English languages. The second edition. Boston, 1819, 12mo, pp. 214.*

No true friend of good parsing or good humour can justify it to his conscience, certainly not to his interest, to remain long out of possession of this book. It may be regarded, in a twofold light, either as a system of English Grammar, in which respect it contains all that is necessary to be known, about the parts of speech; or, what is far more precious in our sight, as a specimen of primitive simplicity of character. As to parsing, however valuable it may be for that class of men who probably first cultivated it, the grammarians, we are jealous that it is not an exercise extremely well adapted to the comprehension of children. The imitative principle is much stronger, in them, than the reasoning; and we imagine they would learn to read and write English correctly by simple practice, quite as soon as by this scholastic and to them unintelligible process of generalization, called parsing. If the child for instance says 'it is me,' why is it not enough to be told that he must say 'it is I?' It does not give him any additional light on the subject, to add that *me* is an objective case and cannot govern the verb. If he be mature enough to reason about this, he will perceive no other force in the reason thus given, than that which is derived from the arbitrary practice of the language; and to feel the force of this reason, he must learn, by constant repetition, what that practice is. For mere English learners the process is the more preposterous, as the names of the parts of speech, of most of the inflections, and of the rules of grammar are a dead letter to them, built on etymologies wholly unknown to them, and often grounded on the analogy of languages wholly different in their structure from the English. Much of our grammar is accordingly not English grammar, but rules for translating Latin into English. We have but two *cases* in our nouns, but are taught in some grammars that there are six. Not more than half our adjectives have degrees of comparison; and all that is strictly true about the rest is, that *pulcrrior*, instead of being rendered *beautiful*, should be rendered *more beautiful*. In the verbs, we have but one *tense* besides the

present, and yet our English grammars fit out the verb with six tenses. But to say that the perfect tense of *love*, is *I have loved*, means that *amavi*, for want of a corresponding English inflection, must be translated *I have loved*, which by the way it does not mean, more than half the time. Much the same is the case with the *modes*; and had the Arabian Grammarians attained the ascendancy in the European schools, which the Latin ones did, our verbs would probably have been adorned with twenty-eight conjugations in imitation of that copious language.

The most, which can be useful in the science of English grammar, is to have a name and a rule for all the inflections and peculiarities, which really exist. But to have an English tense or an English case for every thing analogous in Latin and Greek, is to study Latin and Greek, and not English. Nor is there any greater propriety in having a first and second future in English, than a first and second aorist and a dual number. And since there exists, and probably will continue to, a strong hankering after what is called parsing, we really wish some judicious teacher would have courage to analyze the language as it is, and teach his children not Latin and Greek grammar in disguise, but simple English. A good approach toward this was made some years since, in a short system of English grammar, extracted by Mr. Biglow from Adam's Latin Grammar; but the process might be carried farther, and the learning of the language be much facilitated to children.

But we turn to the little book before us. Mr. Barrett, it seems, from several highly respectable testimonials prefixed to his Grammar, is a teacher of some celebrity both of the English and of the learned languages. He has not been permanently fixed in that capacity, in any one spot, but has laboured at intervals in Hopkinton and Franklin, and if we are not grossly misinformed also at Attleborough and Mendon. Without pertinaciously rooting down on one spot, and teaching on, whether the children have learned out or the parents paid out, or not, Mr. Barrett goes where he is most wanted, and thus scatters abroad what light it is in his power to dispense. We presume we shall excite no one's jealousy, by pronouncing him the teacher of the first pretensions, in this walk of his profession; and in the practice of talking Latin with his pupils, as soon as they can understand it, we are

fearful he might be recommended as an example to some in its highest stations. We shall give our readers at once an idea of his character, by pronouncing him an enthusiast ; a man whose heart is wrapped up in the pursuit, to which his life has been devoted, and who has transferred to Corderius and Virgil those affections which common men are prone to waste on a thousand gaudy vanities, of no real value in a grammatical point of view. From the indications of character contained in this little book, as well as the voice of fame, we should fancy he was not unlike the venerable personage, who in his transports of joy threw the manuscript of Æschylus into the fire ; and if ever the happy day is to dawn upon us, when some cheerful spirit, with a cool observing eye, a benevolent temper, and a happy pen, shall look round about on society, and gather up the original traits of manners, which exist among us, to be embodied into a national novel, we are sure that such a character as this will be among the first, on which he will seize.

Madame de Stael says, in her Germany, that it would be well worth one's while to take some one leading idea (we think she has it) and devote his life to the pursuit of that. Mr. Barrett seems evidently to have been of her mind, and chosen *parsing* for his cynosure. Some philosophers have defined man a laughing animal, some a tool-making animal ; and a distinguished living historian broadly hints, that he might be correctly characterised as a cooking animal. Whether our author would go the length of defining him to be a parsing animal, we know not ; but at any rate he plainly considers that parsing is the final cause of language, and not the understanding of language the final cause of parsing. Thus,

‘ Methinks I tread in air,

Surprising happiness, unlooked for joy !’

‘ *Methinks* is a most wretched word, and though we frequently find it in some of our best authors, yet it is so ridiculous and absurd, that it ought to be expunged from the English language ; for there is no word, which carries more of stupidity on the front of it ; and in my opinion can be *parsed* upon no principle whatever.’

Mr. Barrett accordingly proposes in all cases to correct *methinks* into *I think*, and gives the following instance of the correction ;

‘Methinks I see a heavenly host  
Of angels on the wing,  
Methinks I hear their charming notes ;  
How merrily they sing.’

Corrected

‘I think, I see a heavenly host  
Of angels on the wing,  
I think I hear their charming notes ;  
How merrily they sing.’

Another agreeable illustration of our author’s determination that the syntax shall come to pass though the heavens fall, is his doctrine that *you*, in the familiar style, is second person *singular*, and *are* the same, upon the ground that *they* are applied to one person.

‘If any should object,’ says he, ‘that *are* is always in the plural number, and therefore cannot agree with a noun in the singular number, they may as well say that *were* is always of the plural number. and therefore cannot agree with a noun in the singular number ; for instance, “if I were in your place, I would behave better.”’

The biographical sketches interspersed throughout the work are of themselves worth three times the price of the book, which is but three shillings, New England money. We shall extract a few of them.

‘Gerard Vossius, a gentleman of the greatest figure among the ancients, for grammatical learning.’

‘Mr. Murray is in my opinion a very ingenious gentleman, and has made some excellent observations in his *English Grammar*.’

The notice of Tate and Brady is too long to be copied entire. We extract the following ;

‘In 1696,’ says Mr Barrett, ‘they completed a new version of the psalms of David, fitted to the tunes used in churches, in which they discovered the greatest ingenuity, and by which they did themselves the greatest honor ; for his majesty was so well pleased with the performance, that he not only declared it to be a very ingenious piece of work, but *ordered* their translation of the psalms to be sung in all the churches, *which should see fit to receive it*’—

a most tyrannical imposition on conscience !

After some remarks on Sternhold and Hopkins, the recollection of Addison’s translation of the 23d Psalm crosses his

mind. He must be a man of sterner stuff than we are, who can ever think of that translation, without being touched and softened, and our author, though with a misgiving that it was not much to the purpose, adds, ‘ though some may think it is a digression from my subject to insert it here, yet it is *so lovely* that I cannot omit it.

‘ The Lord my pasture shall prepare,’ &c.

It is lovely, and we can hardly omit it ourselves. Whether for piety or poetry we know not where is any thing superior to it ; nor in what language any thing is to be found more sweet in thought or diction (save one word a little too fine) than these lines ;

‘ To fertile vales and dewy meads  
My weary, wandering steps he leads,  
Where peaceful rivers soft and slow  
Amid the verdant *landscape* flow.’

The following character of Master Clark breathes the same kind spirit, and enthusiasm for his own pursuit, which is the source of all high excellence. Poor Mr. Clark’s manes we think must rejoice at the tribute. Since the stern spirit of modern improvement has begun to spread in our country, his faithful translations of Eutropius and Justin have fallen into comparative disrepute, and there is reason for serious fears that his Cornelius Nepos will soon share the same fate.

‘ This Mr. Clark,’ says our author, ‘ was a schoolmaster all his life. He was master of the public grammar school at Hull, in England, and author of the “ Introduction to the making of Latin, to which is added the history of Greece and Rome,” a book for which I have reason to be thankful to his memory. He also translated several of the classics from Latin into English, and was a very faithful, laborious and industrious gentleman ; and it is really surprising to me, that such a worthy, respectable character was so little noticed by the literati.’

The following extract will show that though Mr. Barrett professes only to teach the Greek, Latin, and English language, he has not wholly neglected the French.

‘ Young gentlemen’s and ladies’ knowledge of the French language is not worth much, unless they understand the Latin language very well, if they acquire it by conversing with such gentlemen and ladies, as speak it with the greatest correctness and

propriety, or by studying it grammatically under the tuition of a gentleman well acquainted with it; for as there are so many words in it derived from the Latin language, they will have but an imperfect knowledge of French, and relish none of its beauties. I would therefore advise all young gentlemen and ladies, who propose to study French, to study Latin in the first place, if they can.

‘The French word *suffla*, which is *bellows* in English, is a very beautiful word, being derived from the Latin verb *sufflo*, which is to blow under, which is compounded of *sub* and *flo*. *Sub* is *under* in Latin, and *flo* is *to blow*. The words in English, which are commonly given to these words in French, are not correct. ‘*Commencez vous portez vous, monsieur?*’ ‘*Fort bien, monsieur.*’ ‘*How do you do, sir?*’ ‘*Very well, sir.*’ These words are not. *verbum pro verbo*, or word for word, from the French. The following translation is word for word. ‘*How do you bear yourself up, sir?*’ or, ‘*how do you sustain or support yourself, sir?*’ ‘*Bravely well, sir.*’ *Commencez* is derived from the Latin adverb *quomodo*, *how*. *Vous* is derived from the plural personal pronoun *vos* in Latin, which is *you*. *Portez* is derived from the verb *porto* in Latin, the primary signification of which is, to bear or carry on the arms. *Fort* is derived from the adverb *fortiter* in Latin, which is *bravely*, being derived from the adjective *fortis*, which is *brave*. *Bien* is derived from the adverb *bene* in Latin, which is *well.*’ pp. 170, 171.

As the controversy with respect to the importance of a knowledge of the learned languages is daily getting more interesting among us, and as we profess an attachment wholly disinterested to them, we take pleasure in bringing so able an advocate as Mr. Barrett into the field on our side, together with the auxiliaries which he has mustered.

‘The late celebrated Lord Chesterfield, that prodigy of science and polite literature, says, that it is a very great shame indeed, for a gentleman who professes himself a scholar to be ignorant of the Greek and Latin languages; and the late pious and venerable Doctor Watts, whose virtues and mental accomplishments were too great ever to be forgotten, says, that they are the foundation of law, physick, and divinity.

There is particularly, in the following paragraph not a little pungency as well as truth.

‘I have been credibly informed, that the celebrated Doctor Rush has spoken very contemptuously of the Greek and Latin  
*New Series*, No. 6. 41

languages, and I was surprised to hear it ; for as great a genius as he is esteemed by some, he did not discover his sense there ; and I very much doubt whether the doctor ever had a good knowledge of them ; for I never heard a gentleman speak disrespectfully of them, who understood them well. No gentleman ever has spoken more highly of them, than the Rev. Vicessimus Knox, in his Essay upon the Education of Youth in Grammar Schools, by which he has done himself the greatest honour.' p. 173.

With respect to female education the doctrines of our author are equally sound. He quotes the opinion of ' the Rev. Vicessimus Knox of Tunbridge, England, a gentleman highly distinguished by a truly polite classical education, a grammar schoolmaster, and a clergyman of the honourable church of England,' ' that a young lady of good memory and brilliant abilities ought to be carefully instructed in Greek and Latin.' Nor does he shrink from the objection which may be made to their so doing.

' But some say, what advantage will it be to a young lady to study Greek and Latin ? It will be much better for her to be employed at her needle, or even at her cards, and spinning wheel ; but, if she must have some polite accomplishment, let her have the polite and fashionable accomplishment of dancing genteelly, together with some other things which Lord Chesterfield has laid down in his principles of politeness. I never was opposed to young ladies behaving civilly and well wherever they go, but was always opposed to their spending so much of their precious time in dancing, which might be spent in other things, much more useful and necessary for them ; and I very much dislike some things which Lord Chesterfield has laid down in his principles of politeness, though it must be confessed, that he was a gentleman of distinguished abilities, a most excellent classic scholar, a cordial friend to a truly polite classical education, understood human nature completely, and certainly has written some things, which are worthy not only to be noticed, but practised by every one.' p. 172, 173.

To show that he has had some encouragement in actual experience, for recommending the study of the learned languages to young ladies, our author informs us that he has ' lately instructed three young ladies in the Latin language, in the dialogues of Corderius and the fables of Æsop, in Franklin, Massachusetts ; and that they were remarkably docile, and discovered the greatest ingenuity in conjugating



and declining the verbs.' 'I wish for my part with all my heart,' he adds, 'that it might become fashionable for young ladies to study Greek and Latin. It would be much better for them, than frequenting balls and theatrical amusements, and a good knowledge of Latin is indispensably necessary for such young ladies, as design to study French.'

There is, as far as we have observed, in this little work, but one severe thing, notwithstanding the wide reach of some of the remarks ; and this one is so sly, and withal so well meant and well felt, that we think it likely one half of those who peruse the book will pass over it unawares, and the other half join in it. Mr. Barrett is speaking of such phrases, as 'buy him some books,' and remarks, that 'men, who have not a critical knowledge of English grammar, often run into a very great mistake in parsing such phrases, as being both governed by the verb, when it is the latter noun only that is governed by it, and the former noun is governed by a preposition understood.' He then adds, 'if *him* were the object after buy, then I should command the person whom I addressed to *buy him* ; and where is the man to be bought ? At Boston market or Providence ? Must I have occasion to use these words. *Risum teneatis amici* '

Comparisons are notoriously invidious ; nor do we wish to hazard our popularity by giving an opinion between this grammar, and various others in circulation. We doubt not they have all their respective merits. It would perhaps be found, on an impartial examination, that, though the 'Young Ladies' Accidence' is particularly strong in the pronominal adjective, Perry has the advantage in the potential mode ; and if Murray's Abridgment has laid down the syntax with singular discretion, Tucker is equally forcible on the semicolon. But none of them, that we have had an opportunity of perusing, exhibits half the originality of character, which shines out in every page of the grammar before us, and we cannot but again enjoin on all our readers, who love to encourage merit, to reward zeal, and to observe the working of unsophisticated nature, to purchase this book.